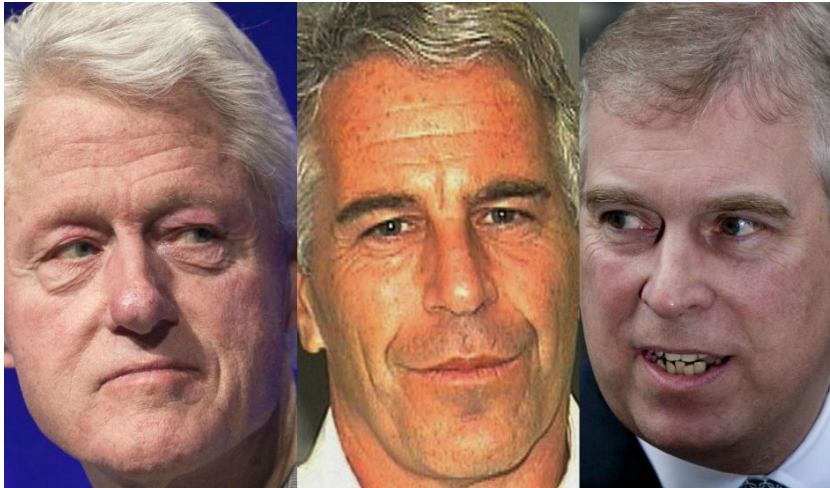


Jeffrey Epstein: The Sex Offender Who Mixes With Princes and Premiers

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Clinton and Epstein

Epstein (C) is being accused of sexual abuse by Virginia Roberts, having previously pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitution with a minor and was jailed for 18 months. Former president Bill Clinton (L) and Prince Andrew (R) have all been known to spend time with the billionaire. Reuters, AP

Even by the standards of the British Royal family, the case of Prince Andrew and the underage sex slave is a peculiar one.

– now a married, 31-year-old mother of three – has filed an affidavit in a Florida federal court in which she swears in gruesome detail that the late press baron and pension fiddler Robert Maxwell's daughter Ghislaine recruited her to satisfy the sexual needs of billionaire financier Jeffrey Epstein and his friends. Those friends, according to Roberts, included the Duke of York, now fifth in line to the throne, and celebrity lawyer Alan Dershowitz (best known for getting Claus von Bulow's conviction for murdering his wife overturned). Buckingham Palace have denied everything more than once. Dershowitz is suing. From 1999 onwards, when she was just 15, Virginia spent much of her time on Epstein's Boeing 727 – nickname, the "Lolita Express" – on an unsavoury kind of world tour that included, she says, an orgy with Andrew on Epstein's private island of Little St James, or "Little St Jeff", as it became known.

One of the many extraordinary things about this sordid story that Jackie Collins would blush to create – aside from the fact that Andrew chose to refer to it at the World Economic Forum in Davos, of all places, but then was unable to keep his cool when asked if he would be making a statement under oath (he walked out of the room without answering) – is that Andrew would be friends with Jeffrey Epstein in the first place. But then again, as both Bill Clinton and Stephen Hawking have been to Little St James as part of Epstein's circle, he was hardly alone.

Around Epstein the question hovers: who exactly is this man who makes such powerful friends and how does he do it?

The 62-year-old registered sex offender comes from a gritty background in Brooklyn, with no university degree and no clear explanation for his many millions. As he mixes with princes and premiers and lives in multiple mansions his web runs wide and deep in politics, science, academia and business, as well as royalty.

Some presidents and princes, having acquired a taste for the trappings of high office or monarchy, find it hard to resist the allure of the private jet. There were obviously other attractions for Prince Andrew and Bill Clinton – the private island in the Caribbean described by former staff as "like a five star hotel where nobody paid", the pretty girls offering massages, the on-tap chat about theoretical physics – but with his 600 flying hours a year to play with, usually with guests on board – Epstein had a lot of flight leverage. Which is why in this unseemly saga, just as Prince Andrew is being forced to issue what feel like daily denials about accusations of having sex with an underage girl at Mr Epstein's many houses, eye-popping names surface in the Caribbean sea.

Stephen Hawking, attending a conference paid for by Epstein, was pictured at a barbecue on the “island of sin” as it has become known. With him in one picture were David Gross, an American physicist and Nobel laureate and Harvard professor called Lisa Randall. Two other Nobel laureates, Gerard t’Hooft and Frank Wilczek, have visited too. As has Professor Lawrence Krauss, and on other occasions his great friend, scientist Martin Nowak, who moved from Princeton to Harvard and with whose research he has funded.

Epstein mixes with the elite of the science world because he was a calculus and physics teacher. Born and raised in Coney Island, he attended some classes in physics and mathematical physiology of the heart, though he never graduated from anywhere. When he taught at Dalton School (a private school in New York) between 1973-75, part of the Epstein mythology goes, a parent was so impressed with his Dead Poets Society-type enthusiasm, mathematical ability and imagination that he suggested he move to Wall Street. So after a stint at Bear Stearns, he became a financial advisor to the extremely rich – it was said that only billionaires need apply – though only one client, Les Wexner, owner of Victoria’s Secret, was known by name. His friends would always insist he was incredibly clever and free-thinking while others find him “arrogant” and “awkward”.

Within a matter of years the schoolteacher-turned-tycoon was living the life of the American billionaire, with a villa in Palm Beach, a ranch in New Mexico, an apartment in Paris, as well as Little St James and what looks like the largest private house in New York. Last time I walked past it, in the snow, the pavements were covered with ice everywhere apart from outside his house; the pavement is heated to make sure they never freeze over.

But even amongst this extreme wealth and luxury, the financier in casual clothes – he never wears a suit – was never a high profile socialite, or keen on much interaction. Then Ghislaine Maxwell came into his life. Where Epstein might gravitate towards scientists, she served up Prince Andrew, as it were, in whose circles she’d mixed for years. Thus it was that Epstein and Maxwell went shooting at Sandringham. Epstein could talk science for hours, but his manners were unusual in a host – staff on Little St James said he only picked at food, never drank, and got up at dawn, whereas Ghislaine had her father’s bombastic charisma. Leaving aside the question of whether she served as his madam, and joined in the underage sex herself (as has been alleged), she certainly oiled the social wheels for him. So in Little St James Lord Mandelson and his boyfriend Reinaldo came to visit. Other friends included Donald Trump and Kevin Spacey.

For years the court of Jeffrey Epstein, courtesy of Ghislaine Maxwell, was thriving with the power-brokers, thinkers and players. But as one who knew them both for years says, “Ghislaine used the fact she knew other powerful people to seduce powerful people. But it boils down to this: what exactly did these men see in this private-jet, private-island owning weirdo? They didn’t want to play scrabble so what do you think?”

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